



NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Request for Proposals RFP SOSVR2007-001

Consultants to Undertake Municipal Vital Records Preservation Assessments

July 6, 2006

Introduction

The New Hampshire Department of State is requesting proposals from qualified consultants to undertake assessments of vital records storage and preservation in municipalities and make recommendations for improvements.

It is anticipated that three to five consultants will be approved to undertake new and updated vital records assessments in municipalities throughout New Hampshire. This document includes the specifications and procedures required for submitting a proposal.

Background

The State of New Hampshire's Vital Records Improvement Fund (VRIF), created in 1991 and recodified in 2005, exists for the, "sole purpose . . . to provide revenues for the improvement of the registration, certification, preservation, and management of the state's vital records. . . . Moneys in the fund shall be allocated for software applications and development, preservation efforts, hardware, communications and technical support."¹ VRIF revenue is derived from a portion of the fees collected for copying and verifying vital records.²

Most VRIF expenditures to date have been used for hardware acquisitions and software development and maintenance, including providing hardware and technical support to city and town clerks to support utilization and data entry in the NH Vital Records Information Network (NHVRIN). Funds are also being used by the NH Department of State Division of Vital Records to key in records data back to 1935 so that these can be included in NHVRIN and made available to municipalities electronically.

¹ The VRIF, which is described in RSA 5-C:15, should not be confused with the New Hampshire local government records management improvement fund created in 2002 under RSA 5:47-51. The latter program has not, as yet, been funded. While municipal officials have a statutory responsibility to care for and preserve public records (as described in RSA 41:58-59, RSA 33-A, and Administrative Rules Mur 300), state support described in this document is confined by statute to vital records preservation and management.

² "Vital record," as defined in RSA 5-C:1, refers to a certificate or report of a (a) Birth, (b) Adoption, (c) Death, (d) Fetal death, (e) Marriage, (f) Divorce, (g) Legal separation, or (h) Civil annulment.

Some of the fund revenue has also been used to support vital records preservation at the municipal level, including 1996 assessments of vital record storage and preservation needs in 34 communities. In 1998, grants were awarded to five municipalities to help address critical vital records storage and preservation needs.

Planned Assistance for Municipal Vital Records Preservation in FY 07

A process is underway to expand support to city and town clerks for municipal vital records preservation in FY 07 (July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007). An administrator was hired in May 2006 to work with the city and town clerks, the Secretary of State (SOS), the Division of Vital Records administration, and the Vital Records Improvement Fund Advisory Committee (VRIFAC) to design and implement a program to distribute a portion of VRIF funds to NH municipalities to address vital records storage and preservation needs.

This assistance will be provided in four categories: (1) assessment and planning by qualified experts; (2) improvements to the records storage environment, records security, and related equipment; (3) rehousing, reformatting and conservation of vital records, including microfilming; and (4) special requests that fall outside the three other categories. Every municipality is required to have a completed “category one” assessment of their vital records by an expert consultant *before* they can apply for assistance from categories two or three.

Assessment Process

This RFP is designed to address the need for assessment expertise under assistance category one as listed above. The intent is to approve three to five consultants to undertake new and updated municipal vital records assessments throughout the state.

Upon receipt of a completed assessment application from a city or town clerk, the grant administrator will provide the clerk with consultant contact information. The city or town clerk will then contact the consultant and set up a mutually agreed upon work schedule for the assessment. Upon receipt of an invoice and a copy of the assessment report, the VRIF will pay the consultant directly for his or her services and travel, consistent with the established payment rate.

A number of municipalities have completed prior records assessments, including those funded by the VRIF in 1996 and by Dartmouth College’s NH Local Records Education Project (NHLREP) in 1998. In the event that a municipality has had a prior assessment, the city or town clerk may choose to (1) have a new, updated assessment or (2) proceed directly to a category two or three request. In the latter case, being a “grandfathered” municipality, the city or town clerk shall attach a copy of the prior assessment to its application form for a category two or three grant, along with a brief narrative that

summarizes any changes in status since the assessment was completed. In this latter case, the consultants selected under this RFP will not have a role in the process.

It is anticipated that 30 to 100 municipalities will want new or updated assessments in FY 07. While there is no guarantee of any consulting work after being approved for the consultant list, it is anticipated that each approved consultant will undertake 5 to 25 assessments during the eleven-month period from August 2006 to June 2007.

Assuming satisfactory work and continued program funding, the approved consultants may be asked to undertake additional assessments in FY 08 and future years. Approved consultants may also be considered for other upcoming work under the grant program, such as training on records preservation and reformatting of documents.

Assessment Specifications

Each new assessment shall include a consultant site visit to the community to view every area where vital records are stored and meet with the city or town clerk, followed by writing and submission of a report of the key findings. The report shall focus on *practical steps* to improve vital records storage and preservation. Each report shall include:

- (1) A description and photographs of the current status of vital records: physical space, storage conditions, environmental conditions, security, availability of storage equipment and supplies, fire and flood protection, emergency alarms, and disaster planning, as well as a general description of the quantity and condition of existing vital records (including evidence of mold, brittleness, discoloration, prior damage, etc.) and the extent to which paper records have been microfilmed or imaged electronically (note: a full vital records inventory is not required).
- (2) A description of problem areas, highlighting the most critical needs.
- (3) Practical recommendations that the municipality can implement using existing personnel and resources (for example, creation of a municipal vital records disaster plan).
- (4) Recommendations consistent with VRIF category two, **to improve the storage environment for long term preservation of documents**, *in order of priority with cost estimates for each recommendation*. Recommendations might include some of the following:
 - Acquire equipment or supplies to monitor, prevent, or regulate temperature, humidity, mold, ultraviolet radiation, pollutants, insects, and/or dust (including hygrothermographs, data loggers, dehumidifiers, and HEPA - high efficiency particulate air-filter vacuum cleaners)

- Protect records from potential water or fire damage, including smoke alarms, wiring fire alarms directly to fire departments, flood alarms, and fire suppression (such as sprinkler systems)
- Acquire metal shelving, compact shelving, or linear roll-out shelving to replace wooden shelves or other inadequate shelving
- Undertake minor renovations to an existing storage facility
- Support the design or construction of a new document storage vault or facility
- Acquire a prefabricated modular vault
- Improve records security, such as segregating vital records (for example, installing a caged-in area in a larger records storage facility) or initiatives to comply with pending intelligence reform federal legislation³

Note: in the event that any of the above needs (such as the design or construction of a new storage facility) exceed the \$10,000 threshold, the committee will consider supporting requests for a prorated portion of the total cost; any such request from a municipality must delineate precisely what the grant funds will purchase, the percentage of the project that relates to vital records, as opposed to other municipal records, and include documentation/certification on the availability of the additional matching funds needed to complete the project.

(5) Recommendations consistent with VRIF grant category three: **to improve document rehousing, reformatting and conservation.** Grant assistance in this category will be made available if the municipality can demonstrate/document that it has addressed the most critical storage improvements in category two and that documents are stored in an adequate storage environment; consultant recommendations should reflect this approach. Recommendations, *in order of priority with cost estimates for each*, may include:

- Acquire archival storage boxes or other archival storage supplies
- Conserve and rebind records, focusing on the most vulnerable
- Encapsulate vulnerable documents and acquire plastic boxes
- Microfilm documents or imaging of microfilm
- Hire a consultant to undertake vital records reformatting⁴
- Purchase of equipment, such as a microfilm scanner and reader or edge platen photocopier attachments (i.e., Binder Minder™) to protect book bindings when photocopying.⁵

³ Final determination of federal requirements is pending, and the SOS and VRIFAC are setting aside additional VRIF funds to assist city and town clerks to comply with these anticipated regulations.

⁴ The committee may also consider requests to support the short term hiring of temporary help (such as summer college students) to undertake document conservation “housekeeping” (such as removal of staples and tape) or preservation photocopying under the supervision of the town clerk; the availability of matching funds would enhance such requests.

⁵ Given current concerns about the long-term preservation of electronic documents, the committee is reluctant to fund scanners and imaging software. Any municipality requesting support for technology enhancements such as document scanning must include a rationale for the choice of the selected technology, as well as formatting and equipment specifications, vendor qualifications, and a description of

- (6) Priority recommendations that fall outside the above categories, including those that may be beyond the VRIF parameters or respond to an emergency situation or need for disaster planning. While the focus of the assessment is on vital records, it is understood that some issues such as storage require a broader perspective on municipal records as a whole; consultants are encouraged to make general observations and recommendations about municipal records management with the understanding that the assessment focus remains on vital records.

It is anticipated that each assessment will require two to four days total: one to two days on site, including travel, plus one to two days for report writing. For each assessment, consultants will be paid for actual days worked at their approved daily rate, not to exceed four days per assessment, plus travel costs at the current IRS mileage rate.

Application Process

Interested parties shall submit the following:

- (1) Statement of qualifications, experience, and CVs of the consultant(s), including prior experience with municipal record assessments and samples of completed assessments. In the event that an organization is applying, information must be supplied for every individual who will be doing the consulting, including each's geographic location (if different from the organizational address); no subcontracting will be allowed.
- (2) Brief narrative of the consultant's availability, willingness to travel, and general approach consistent with the specifications and program objectives (note: applicants must affirm their availability and willingness to travel to, and work in, any NH community, large or small, requesting an assessment)
- (3) Daily rate.

Submit an electronic copy of your complete proposal to: douglass.teschner@sos.nh.gov

and five paper copies to: Dr. Douglass Teschner
Vital Records Preservation Grant Program
Department of State
Division of Archives and Records Management
71 South Fruit St.
Concord, NH 03301

Proposals must be received no later than 4:30 PM EST on Monday, August 7, 2006.

how the municipality will continually move forward technology development in future years to ensure that electronic files will be accessible.

Evaluation of Proposals

Proposals will be evaluated based upon documented qualifications of the consultant (25%), documented experience and quality of assessment samples provided (25%), cost (25%), and general approach and compliance with the objectives of the Vital Records Preservation Grant Program (25%). If necessary, supplemental or clarifying information will be requested.

Accessibility to NH communities will also be a factor in the decision-making process; ideally, the approved consultant pool will represent sufficient geographic diversity to ensure that there is at least one consultant at a reasonable driving distance from every NH municipality.

Receipt of all applications will be acknowledged within ten working days. Notification of approval or disapproval will be made within sixty days of proposal receipt. The VRIFAC and grants administrator will review proposals and select the consultants.

Additional Information

Information on the Vital Records Preservation Grant Program for City and Town Clerks will be made available on the Secretary of State web site (www.sos.nh.gov) and updated regularly. Proactive outreach efforts will be initiated to inform clerks about this program.

“Best practice” guidelines for record preservation (including recommendations for storage, paper record preservation, microfilming, and digital imaging) and links to various resources will be made available on the SOS web site.

The SOS will offer workshops on grant writing and vital records preservation for city and town clerks, and information on these will be posted on the SOS web site.

City and town clerks are encouraged to apply for additional record preservation funds to supplement or complement VRIF funding and address municipal record preservation needs designated in RSA 33-A that are not funded by the VRIF grant program. One such funding resource is the NH Moose plate program implemented by the NH State Library in the NH Department of Cultural Resources which provides grants up to \$10,000; this year’s application deadline is August 31, 2006, and information is available at www.nh.gov/nhsl/moose.html.

The SOS will pursue other opportunities for records preservation funding to NH municipalities, including the possibility of federal funds through the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) of the National Archives and Records Administration.

Any questions about the Vital Records Preservation Grant Program may be addressed to Dr. Douglass Teschner at douglass.teschner@sos.nh.gov or (603) 271-2236.